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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE RAILROAD BUSINESS ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK CITY ON JANUARY 27, 1916

By

HON. WOODROW WILSON
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

PRESENTED BY MR. CHILTON
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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS.

NEW YORK, *January 27, 1916.*

Mr. TOASTMASTER, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN: The exactions of my official duties have recently been so great that it has been very seldom indeed that I could give myself so great a pleasure as that which I am enjoying to-night. It is a great pleasure to come and be greeted in such generous fashion by men so thoughtful as yourselves and so deeply engaged in some of the most important undertakings of the Nation, and I consider it a privilege to be permitted to lay before you some of the things to which we ought to give our most careful and deliberate consideration.

The question, it seems to me, which most demands clarification just now is the question to which your toastmaster has referred, the question of preparation for national defense. I say that it stands in need of clarification because it has been deeply clouded by passion and prejudice. It is very singular that a question the elements of which are so simple and so obvious should have been so beclouded by the discussion of men of high motive, men of purpose as handsome as any of us may claim and yet apparently incapable of divesting themselves of that sort of provincialism which consists in thinking the contents of their own mind to be the contents of the mind of the world. For, gentlemen, while America is a very great Nation, while America contains every element of fine force and accomplishment, America does not constitute the major part of the world. We live in a world which we did not make, which we can not alter, which we can not think into a different condition from that which actually exists. It would be a hopeless piece of provincialism to suppose that because we think differently from the rest of the world we are at liberty to assume that the rest of the world will permit us to enjoy that thought without disturbance.

It is a surprising circumstance, also, that men should allow partisan feeling or personal ambition to creep into the discussion of this fundamental thing. How can Americans differ about the safety of America? I, for my part, am ambitious that America should do a greater and more difficult thing than the great nations on the other side of the water have done. In all the belligerent countries men without distinction of party have drawn together to accomplish a successful prosecution of the war. Is it not a more difficult and a more desirable thing that all Americans should put partisan prepossessions aside and draw together for the successful prosecution of peace? I covet that distinction for America; and I believe that America is going to enjoy that distinction. Only the other day the leader of the Republican minority in the House of Representatives delivered a speech which showed that he was ready and, I take it for

granted, that the men behind him were ready, to forget party lines in order that all men may act with a common mind and impulse for the service of the country; and I want upon this first public occasion to pay my tribute of respect and obligation to him.

I find it very hard indeed to approach this subject without very deep emotion, gentlemen, because when we speak of America and the things that are to be conserved in her, does it not call a wonderful picture into your mind? America is young still; she is not yet even in the heydey of her development and power. Think of the great treasures of youth and energy and ideal purpose still to be drawn from the deep sources from which this Nation has always drawn its life. Think of the service which those forces can and must render to the rest of the world. Think of the position into which America has been drawn, almost in spite of herself, by the circumstances of the present day. She alone is free to help find things wherever they show themselves in the world. She will be forced also, whether she will or not, in the decades immediately ahead of us, to furnish the world with its chief economic guidance and assistance.

It is very fine to remember what ideals will be back of that assistance. Economic assistance in itself is not necessarily handsome. It is a legitimate thing to make money, but it is not an ideal thing to make money. Money brings with it power which may be well or ill employed, and it should be the pride of America always to employ her money to the highest purpose. Yet if we are drawn into the maelstrom that now surges across the water, swirls alike in the western and eastern regions of the world, we shall not be permitted to keep a free hand to do the high things that we intend to do. It is necessary, therefore, that we should examine ourselves and see whether we can make certain that the tasks imposed upon us will be performed, well performed, and performed without interruption.

America has been reluctant to match her wits with the rest of the world. When I face a body of men like this it is almost incredible to remember that only yesterday they were afraid to put their wits into free competition with the world. The best brains in the world afraid to match brains with the rest of the world. We have preferred to be provincial. We have preferred to stand behind protecting devices. And now, whether we will or no, we are thrust out to do on a scale never dreamed of by recent generations in America the business of the world. We can not any longer be a provincial Nation.

Let no man dare to say, if he would speak the truth, that the question of preparation for national defense is a question of war or of peace. If there is one passion more deep-seated in the hearts of our fellow countrymen than another, it is the passion for peace. No nation in the world ever more instinctively turned away from the thought of war than this Nation to which we belong. Partly because in the plenitude of its power, in the unrestricted area of its opportunities, it has found nothing to covet in the possession and power of other nations. There is no spirit of aggrandizement in America. There is no desire on the part of any thoughtful and conscientious American man to take one foot of territory from any other nation in the world. I myself share to the bottom of my heart that profound love for peace. I have sought to maintain peace against very great and sometimes very unfair odds. I have had many a

time to use every power that was in me to prevent such a catastrophe as war coming upon this country. It is not permissible for any man to say that anxiety for the defense of the Nation has in it the least tinge of desire for a power that can be used to bring on war.

But, gentlemen, there is something that the American people love better than they love peace. They love the principles upon which their political life is founded. They are ready at any time to fight for the vindication of their character and of their honor. They will not at any time seek the contest, but they will at no time cravenly avoid it; because if there is one thing that the individual ought to fight for, and that the Nation ought to fight for, it is the integrity of its own convictions. We can not surrender our convictions. I would rather surrender territory than surrender those ideals which are the staff of life of the soul itself.

And because we hold certain ideals we have thought that it was right that we should hold them for others as well as for ourselves. America has more than once given evidence of the generosity and disinterestedness of its love of liberty. It has been willing to fight for the liberty of others as well as for its own liberty. The world sneered when we set out upon the liberation of Cuba, but the world sneers no longer. The world now knows, what it was then loath to believe, that a nation can sacrifice its own interests and its own blood for the sake of the liberty and happiness of another people. Whether by one process or another, we have made ourselves in some sort the champions of free government and national sovereignty in both continents of this hemisphere; so that there are certain obligations which every American knows that we have undertaken.

The first and primary obligation is the maintenance of the integrity of our own sovereignty. That goes as of course. There is also the maintenance of our liberty to develop our political institutions without hindrance; and, last of all, there is the determination and the obligation to stand as the strong brother of all those in this hemisphere who mean to maintain the same principles and follow the same ideals of liberty.

May I venture to insert here a parenthesis? Have any of you thought of this? We have slowly, very slowly indeed, begun to win the confidence of the other States of the American hemisphere. If we should go into Mexico, do you not know what would happen? All the sympthies of the rest of America would look across the water and not northward to the great Republic which we profess to represent; and do you not see the consequences that would ensue in every international relation? Have gentlemen who have rushed down to Washington to insist that we should go into Mexico reflected upon the politics of the world? Nobody seriously supposes, gentlemen, that the United States needs to fear an invasion of its own territory. What America has to fear, if she has anything to fear, are indirect, round-about, flank movements upon her regnant position in the Western Hemisphere. Are we going to open those gates, or are we going to close them? For they are the gates to the hearts of our American friends to the south of us and not gates to the ports merely. Win their spirits and you have won the only sort of leadership and the only sort of safety that America covets. We must all of us think from this time out in terms of the world, and

must learn what it is that America has set out to maintain as a standard bearer for all those who love liberty and justice and righteousness in political action.

But, gentlemen, we must find means to do this thing which are suitable to the time and suitable to our own ideals. Suitable to the time—does anybody understand the time? Perhaps when you learned, as I dare say you did learn beforehand, that I was expecting to address you on the subject of preparedness, you recalled the address which I made to Congress something more than a year ago, in which I said that this question of military preparedness was not a pressing question. But more than a year has gone by since then and I would be ashamed if I had not learned something in 14 months. The minute I stop changing my mind with the change of all the circumstances of the world, I will be a back number.

There is another thing about which I have changed my mind. A year ago I was not in favor of a tariff board, and I will tell you why. Then the only purpose of a tariff board was to keep alive an unprofitable controversy. If you set up any board of inquiry whose purpose it is to keep business disturbed and to make it always an open question what you are going to do about the public policy of the Government, I am opposed to it; and the very men who were dinning it into our ears that what business wanted was to be let alone were, many of them, men who were insisting that we should stir up a controversy which meant that we could not let business alone. There is a great deal more opinion vocal in this world than is consistent with logic. But the circumstances of the present time are these: There is going on in the world under our eyes an economic revolution. No man understands that revolution; no man has the elements of it clearly in his mind. No part of the business of legislation with regard to international trade can be undertaken until we do understand it; and Members of Congress are too busy, their duties are too multifarious and distracting to make it possible within a sufficiently short space of time for them to master the change that is coming.

I hear a great many things predicted about the end of the war; but I do not know what is going to happen at the end of the war; and neither do you. There are two diametrically opposed views as to immigration. Some men tell us that at least a million men are going to leave the country and others tell us that many millions are going to rush into it. Neither party knows what they are talking about, and I am one of those prudent individuals who would really like to know the facts before he forms an opinion; not out of wisdom but out of prudence. I have lived long enough to know that if I do not, the facts will get away with me. I have come to have a great and wholesome respect for the facts. I have had to yield to them sometimes before I saw them coming and that has led me to keep a weather eye open in order that I may see them coming. There is so much to understand that we have not the data to comprehend that I for one would not dare, so far as my advice is concerned, to leave the Government without the adequate means of inquiry—but that is another parenthesis.

What I am trying to impress upon you now is that the circumstances of the world to-day are not what they were yesterday, or ever were in any of our yesterdays. And it is not certain what they

will be to-morrow. I can not tell you what the international relations of this country will be to-morrow, and I use the word literally; and I would not dare keep silent and let the country suppose that to-morrow was certain to be as bright as to-day. America will never be the aggressor, America will always seek to the last point at which her honor is involved to avoid the things which disturb the peace of the world; but America does not control the circumstances of the world, and we must be sure that we are faithful servants of those things which we love, and are ready to defend them against every contingency that may affect or impair them.

And, as I was saying a moment ago, we must seek the means which are consistent with the principles of our lives. It goes without saying, though apparently it is necessary to say it to some excited persons, that one thing that this country never will endure is a system that can be called militarism. But militarism consists in this, gentlemen: It consists in preparing a great machine whose only use is for war and giving it no use upon which to expend itself. Men who are in charge of edged tools and bidden to prepare them for exact and scientific use grow very impatient if they are not permitted to use them, and I do not believe that the creation of such an instrument is an insurance of peace. I believe that it involves the danger of all the impulses that skillful persons have to use the things that they know how to use.

But we do not have to do that. America is always going to use her Army in two ways. She is going to use it for the purposes of peace, and she is going to use it as a nucleus for expansion into those things which she does believe in, namely, the preparation of her citizens to take care of themselves. There are two sides to the question of preparation; there is not merely the military side, there is the industrial side; and the ideal which I have in mind is this: We ought to have in this country a great system of industrial and vocational education under Federal guidance and with Federal aid, in which a very large percentage of the youth of this country will be given training in the skillful use and application of the principles of science in manufacture and business; and it will be perfectly feasible and highly desirable to add to that and combine with it such a training in the mechanism and care and use of arms, in the sanitation of camps, in the simpler forms of maneuver and organization, as will make these same men at one and the same time industrially efficient and immediately serviceable for national defense. The point about such a system will be that its emphasis will lie on the industrial and civil side of life, and that, like all the rest of America, the use of force will only be in the background and as the last resort. Men will think first of their families and their daily work, of their service in the economic ranks of the country, of their efficiency as artisans, and only last of all of their serviceability to the Nation as soldiers and men at arms. That is the ideal of America.

But, gentlemen, you can not create such a system overnight; you can not create such a system rapidly. It has got to be built up, and I hope it will be built up, by slow and effective stages; and there is much to be done in the meantime. We must see to it that a sufficient body of citizens is given the kind of training which will make them efficient now if called into the field in case of necessity. It is discreditable to this country, gentlemen, for this is a country full of

intelligent men, that we should have exhibited to the world the example we have sometimes exhibited to it, of stupid and brutal waste of force. Think of asking men who can be easily trained to come into the field, crude, ignorant, inexperienced, and merely furnishing the stuff for camp fever and the bullets of the enemy. The sanitary experience of our Army in the Spanish-American War was merely an indictment of America's indifference to the manifest lessons of experience in the matter of ordinary, careful preparation. We have got the men to waste, but God forbid that we should waste them. Men who go as efficient instruments of national honor into the field afford a very handsome spectacle indeed. Men who go in crude and ignorant boys only indict those in authority for stupidity and neglect. So it seems to me that it is our manifest duty to have a proper citizen reserve.

I am not forgetting our National Guard. I have had the privilege of being governor of one of our great States, and there I was brought into association with what I am glad to believe is one of the most efficient portions of the National Guard of the Nation. I learned to admire the men, to respect the officers, and to believe in the National Guard; and I believe that it is the duty of Congress to do very much more for the National Guard than it has ever done heretofore. I believe that that great arm of our national defense should be built up and encouraged to the utmost; but, you know, gentlemen, that under the Constitution of the United States the National Guard is under the direction of more than twoscore States; that it is not permitted to the National Government directly to have a voice in its development and organization; and that only upon occasion of actual invasion has the President of the United States the right to ask those men to leave their respective States. I, for my part, am afraid, though some gentlemen differ with me, that there is no way in which that force can be made a direct resource as a national reserve under national authority.

What we need is a body of men trained in association with units of the Army, a body of men organized under the immediate direction of the national authority, a body of men subject to the immediate call to arms of the national authority, and yet men not put into the ranks of the Regular Army; men left to their tasks of civil life, men supplied with equipment and training, but not drawn away from the peaceful pursuits which have made America great and must keep her great. I am not a partisan of any one plan. I have had too much experience to think that it is right to say that the plan that I propose is the only plan that will work, because I have a shrewd suspicion that there may be other plans that will work. What I am after, and what every American ought to insist upon, is a body of at least half a million trained citizens who will serve under conditions of danger as an immediately available national reserve.

I am not saying anything about the Navy to-night, because for some reason there is not the same controversy about the Navy that there is about the Army. The Navy is obvious and easily understood; the Army apparently is very difficult to comprehend and understand. We have a traditional prejudice against armies which makes us stop thinking calmly the minute we begin talking about them. We suppose that all armies are alike and that there can not be an American Army system, that it must be a European system, and that is what I

for one am trying to divest my own mind of. The Navy is so obvious an instrument of national defense that I believe that, with differences of opinion about the detail, it is not going to be difficult to carry out a proper and reasonable program for the increase of the Navy.

But that is another story; my theme to-night is national defense on land where we seem most negligent of it. And I do not want to leave in your minds the impression that I have any anxiety as to the outcome, for I have not the slightest. There is only one way for parties and individuals to win the confidence of this Nation and that is by doing the things that ought to be done. Nobody is going to be deceived. Speeches are not going to win elections. The facts are going to speak for themselves and speak louder than anybody who controverts them. No political party, no group of men, can afford to disappoint America. This is a year of political accounting, and the Americans in politics are rather expert accountants. They know what the books contain and they are not going to be deceived about them. No man is going to hide behind any excuse; the goods must be delivered or the confidence will not be enjoyed. For my part, I hope that every man in public life will get what is coming to him.

If this is true, gentlemen, it is because of things that lie much deeper than laughter, much deeper than cheers; lie down at the very roots of our life. America refuses to be deceived about the things that most concern her national honor and national safety, that lie at the foundation of everything that you love. It is the solemn time when men must examine not only their purposes but their hearts. Men must purge themselves of individual ambition, and must see to it that they are ready for the utmost self-sacrifice in the interests of the common welfare. Let no man dare play the marplot. Let no man dare bring partisan passion into these great things. Let men honestly debate the facts and courageously act upon them. Then there will come that day when the world will say, "This America that we thought was full of a multitude of contrary counsels now speaks with the great volume of the heart's accord, and that great heart of America has behind it the supreme moral force of righteousness and hope and the liberty of mankind."

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